
Correctional Officers' Perceptions of a Solution-Focused Training Program: Potential Implications for Working With Offenders

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to explore correctional officers' perceptions and experiences during a solution-focused training program and to initiate development of a modified pattern for correctional officers to use in jails. The study uses grounded theory procedures combined with a follow-up survey. The findings identified six emergent themes: obstacles to doing counseling work in prisons, offenders' amenability to change, correctional officers' self-image, advantages of a solution-focused approach (SFA), potential advantages of applying SFA to offenders, and the need for the consolidation of learning and transformation. Participants perceived the use of solution-focused techniques as appropriate, important, functional, and of only moderate difficulty in interacting with offenders. Finally, a modified pattern was developed for officers to use when working with offenders in jails. Suggestions and recommendations are made for correctional interventions and future studies.

Keywords

consolidating learning, correctional officer, grounded theory, solution-focused training program

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Given the substantial gap that exists between counseling theory and correctional intervention in jails, there is a tremendous need to better understand the relation between offenders' help-seeking needs and appropriate counseling theory techniques in Taiwan (Pan, Chang, & Lin, 2007). Solution-focused practice sprang from a psychotherapy background but is now used in a wide variety of settings, including nursing, probation service, teaching, mental health services and allied health professions, like occupational therapy and counseling in primary and secondary care (Waskett, 2006). The Solution-Focused Approach (SFA), based on present focus, nonexpert providers, positive orientation, and emphasis on strengths and solutions rather than problems and dysfunction, seems to be able to provide practical advantages for correctional officers working with offenders (Corcoran, 1997). Previous studies reported the use of SFA in an intervention for juvenile offenders (Corcoran, 1997), sex offenders (Williams, 2003), incarcerated fathers (Lange, 2001) and parents (Springer, Lynch, & Rubin, 2004), and domestic violence offenders (Lee, Uken, & Sebold, 2004; Milner & Singleton, 2008). Although previous research allows certain conjectures, correctional officers' point of view in using SFA is mostly absent.

Correctional officers' contacts with offenders go beyond work relations involving broad, daily interactions with inmates (Moon & Maxwell, 2004; Pan et al., 2007). Hence, their true "voices" should be solicited and appreciated by policy makers, practitioners, scholars, and experts. This study responds to this need focusing on correctional officers' assessments of SFA's potential for working with offenders.

SFA and Its Strengths

In contrast with traditional therapies, SFA does not recommend delving into the client's past experiences, except to identify times when the present problem occurred less often (Corey, 2008). Instead, the therapist encourages the client to create a vision of reality in which he or she is able to function successfully, unequivocally ensuring clients about their ability to overcome present problems and adversities (Corey, 2008; Sklare, 2005). SFA philosophy rests on the assumption that concern with unresolved past or present problems diverts from the focus on solutions leading to future recovery. Addressing the memories of the origin or history of the problem is likely to retard the progress of therapy. In fact, SFA is grounded on the optimistic assumption that people are resilient, respectful, and competent and have the ability to construct solutions that can change their lives (Corey, 2008).

Previous research details the ways in which SFA helps offenders to deal with their problems by building a realistic future orientation. First, SFA emphasizes competence, strengths, and possibilities rather than deficits, weaknesses, and limitations of the client (de Shazer et al., 2007). The positive, strength-based perspective fosters a favorable self-perception of the client and thus builds a foundation for change. Second, SFA stresses a present-focus, discouraging discussions of past events, problems, and feelings (Corcoran, 1997; Lange, 2001). Third, SFA uses scaling techniques to direct juveniles and their families to evaluate what they are doing with regard to actions that will lead

to the change they desire (Corcoran, 1997; Franklin, Corcoran, Nowicki, & Streeter, 1997). Fourth, the technique of asking "exception questions" enables offenders to think of times in their lives when they have not encountered the problems identified currently (Corey, 2008; Frederick, 2008; Lee et al., 2004; Milner & Singleton, 2008), which overcomes some clients' belief that their lives cannot be changed or, worse, that they are moving farther away from the desired course of their lives. Finally, the use of SFA effectively engages individuals in direct behavior changes rather than delving into feelings and cognitions that for the offender population is less effective because of their social and psychological characteristics (Chou, 2005; Corcoran, 1997; Corey, 2008). The SFA works with people who have a practical approach to make things better within a short time horizon. Thus, it is well suited to the realities of jails with inmates who have short attention spans and nonvoluntary treatment status (Corcoran, 1997; Franklin et al., 1997).

Within this context, Guterman and Leite (2006) proposed a useful pattern of SFA, which usually involves four stages: (a) constructing a problem and a goal, (b) identifying and amplifying exceptions, (c) assigning tasks designed to identify and amplify exceptions, and (d) evaluating the effectiveness of tasks as well as reevaluating the problem and goal. Previous research has further found that the use of five solution-focused questions yielded significant outcomes. The five questions include pretreatment/between-session change questions, exception questions, scaling questions, miracle questions, and relationship-oriented questions (Berg & Miller, 1992; Chou, 2005).

Problems and Challenges in Jails

Personnel issues in jails are a pressing problem that needs to be dealt with in correctional systems (Kerle, 2006; Ministry of Justice, 2004). Such personnel problems include the need for more pay and more training, education requirements, a means to provide job enrichment, in-depth screening of staff, jail internships stressing corrections as a career, and the use of jail staff to project a positive image to the community (Kerle, 2006). Although funding is tied indirectly with adequate numbers of jail staff, modernization, and even facilities, in-service training and education are the first priority and actions that should be taken (Ministry of Justice, 2004). As we already know, more communities have embraced alternatives to incarceration and have made more efforts to coordinate programs such as medication, education, religion, or vocational training for inmates. However, the expectation that volunteers in such alternative programs be available 5 days a week is unrealistic. Full-time professionals should be educated and invested in if positive results are to be expected (Hwang, 2003; Kerle, 2006). This is necessary because everyone understands that offenders must take responsibility for their own lives, but it is also known that we can no longer just shrug our shoulders at their failures.

Correctional Officer's Role Identity and Function

Prisons, the work environment of corrections, are emotional places (Pan, Chang, & Jiang, 2008). It appears that the most notable stressors for correctional officers are role

problems, work overload, demands of social contacts (with prisoners, colleagues, and supervisors), and poor social status (Kerle, 2006). Thus, the prevalence of various stress reactions among correctional officers is demonstrated through turnover rates, absenteeism, psychosomatic diseases, stress, burnout, work environment variables, gender issues, and level of job dissatisfaction (Hwang, 2003; Kerle, 2006). Therefore, the issue of correctional officers' role identity is of great concern.

The correctional officer's self-image, an issue that has yet to be discussed in the correctional treatment research in Taiwan, is based on a relationship that exists between self-perception and behavior (Lin, Chang, & Chen, 2005). Correctional officers' self-perceptions are a combination of traits, values, thoughts, and feelings. How they see themselves is largely formed by their own perception of what others think of them, which in turn influences their actions (Hwang, 2003). In a cyclical process, their actions determine how others see them and directly influence their reactions to others. On one hand, officers' self-images influence their behaviors in jails and interactions with inmates. On the other hand, their self-images also decide their innovation throughout their life-long learning process. Most behaviors mainly depend on the officers' self-image, positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy (Hwang, 2003).

More importantly, because the correctional system has changed correctional officers' educational roles in prisons, correctional intervention also has shifted from straightforward punishment of offenders to rehabilitation (Ministry of Justice, 2004). Consequently, role expectations have been transformed from purely custodial to human service. Thus, correctional officers also are expected to manage rehabilitation and treatment programs (Hwang, 2003; Moon & Maxwell, 2004; Pan et al., 2007). Based on previous studies (Hwang, 2003; Moon & Maxwell, 2004), counseling training programs are needed for both pre- and in-service correctional training. Nevertheless, a proper training program based on offenders' strengths and achievement of desired goals has not yet been reported (Pan et al., 2007). Although a competency-based counseling training program based on correctional needs has been developed by Pan et al. (2007), the results lack empirical data to support the achievement of goals. Therefore, based on previous studies, the solution-focused training program (SFTP; Corcoran, 1997; Corey, 2008; Guterman & Leite, 2006; Lee et al., 2004; Milner & Singleton, 2008; Sklare, 2005) was developed as a framework for correctional officers' training courses. Although working with inmates and offenders will always be a continuing challenge in jail environments, it might help if correctional officers can approach such challenges with positive thinking of SFA. SFA incorporates treatment goals and strategic planning interventions that seem to be particularly suitable for officers who work with offenders in jails.

In brief, the purpose of this study was to explore correctional officers' perceptions and experiences during an SFTP and to initially provide a modified pattern for correctional officers to use in jails. Grounded theory procedures and a follow-up survey were used. Collected data were analyzed and integrated into potential implications for officers to use in working with offenders in the future. It was hoped that the results would reveal significant findings regarding the use of SFA techniques in jails and the generation of specific research questions and hypotheses for further study.

Method

Participants

Because of the education-oriented criminal policy adopted by the Taiwanese Government, correctional treatment specialists need to be well trained, with an understanding of counseling skills (Ministry of Justice, 2004; Pan et al., 2008). Prior to attending the SFTP, as part of the preservice training programs, all participants had passed the national promotion examination, which included the test of basic concepts of the counseling work. Of the 30 correctional officers attending the SFTP, 29 volunteered to participate in this study. Of the 29 participants, female officers made up 41% ($n = 12$), and male officers made up 59% ($n = 17$), with an age range of 29 to 42 years. Thirty-four percent of the participants ($n = 10$) were college graduates from the Department of Criminal Prevention, and 17% were from social work or psychology ($n = 5$). The rest of the 49% of participants ($n = 14$) were graduates of nonrelated majors. In addition, 15 senior officers had correctional working experiences of more than 5 years, 8 junior officers had 2 to 4 years of such experiences, and 6 novice officers had no previous correctional working experiences.

Program Description

The nature of correctional intervention usually requires correctional officers to deal with criminal clients' psychological and physical problems. Prisons are emotional places, but many offenders hide their emotions, as do prison officers (Crawley, 2004; Hwang, 2003; Pan et al., 2007). Working in prisons demands a performance attitude and an engagement in emotion-work and stress-preventive strategies (Crawley, 2004; Pan et al., 2007). Based on contextual considerations, the content of this training program covered three areas: the basic assumptions of SFA, advanced SFA theory, and the applications of the SFA for officers to deal with offenders' personal concerns. Teaching methods included discussion, role-play, rehearsal, demonstration, and feedback exchange. Based on the principles of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, we followed the basic four-step sequence: (a) identifying and defining a skill, (b) demonstrating or modeling both effective and ineffective examples of a skill, (c) practicing a skill with peer supervision and exchanging feedbacks until minimum competence is achieved, and (d) practicing a skill with supervision in role-playing situations (Pan et al., 2007).

Data Collection

The qualitative methodological approach known as the grounded theory was selected to gather information and construct theoretical conceptualizations. Grounded theory researchers use a set of procedures designed to give the analytic process precision, rigor, and creativity, with a commitment to focusing on exploring and verifying concepts as they emerge through the interactive and systematic processes of data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data were collected from the perceptions and experiences of 29 participants through the focus group interview, weekly training notes, and

the primary researcher's field notes. Based on the objectives of the SFTP, the interview questions of the focus group were developed and presented to a senior qualitative researcher for his advisory suggestions. The focus group interview was conducted 2 weeks after termination of the training program. The questions developed to serve as a framework for the focus group interview are listed as follows:

Opening statements:

Welcome statements regarding the purpose of the focus group interview.

Introductory question:

Overall, what are your perceptions and experiences of your involvement in the SFTP?

Transitional questions:

According to your experiences, what are the most difficult parts of doing counseling work in prison?

Key questions:

Which of the basic assumptions of SFA do you feel may be helpful for offenders to deal with their problems?

What do you think might be the strengths or weaknesses when applying SFA to offenders?

Ending questions:

All things considered, what would you say are the most useful characteristics of SFA for offenders?

How does SFA contribute to officers' professional development for doing counseling work in jails or prisons?

Furthermore, to further examine the possibility of using solution-focused techniques in working with offenders, a follow-up survey was conducted 2 months after the SFTP was closed. Of the 29 correctional officers, 15 senior officers and 8 junior officers had at least 2 years' experience in working with offenders through primary psychological helping services. Hence, it was thought that their responses to the follow-up survey after 2-month jail services might provide valuable and reliable data. The follow-up survey was based on six statements arranged so that every item represented one of the

solution-focused techniques. These techniques were originally identified by de Shazer and colleagues (Chou, 2005; de Shazer, 1988; de Shazer et al., 2007) and include pre-treatment between-session change questions, exception questions, scaling questions, miracle questions, relationship-oriented questions, and praise. The follow-up scale served as the basis for implementing and supplementing data used in this study. Each item indicates levels of appropriateness, importance, function, and difficulties, respectively. The follow-up survey uses a 10-point Likert-type measure, ranging from 1 (*the least agreement*) to 10 (*the most agreement*). For example, one item asks: "To what extent do you identify the use of the changes between pre/during treatment as appropriate, important, and functional?"

Data Analysis

In accordance with grounded theory procedures (Creswell, 1998), we first read all of the participants' responses including written class notes and the verbatim interviews of the focus group to have a general sense of their perception. The researchers met regularly to discuss, review, and analyze data in terms of common reactions, concepts, and themes among all participants' responses to each question. The open coding was completed by separating, identifying, labeling, and categorizing data in terms of general themes. In open coding, for example, a theme surrounding "the barriers of counseling work in jails" was identified by researchers. Then, we grouped all information that seemed to relate to "the barriers of counseling work in jails" into one large group named "obstacles to doing counseling work in prisons." We further used participants' responses to build properties and provide characteristics within this domain to help describe it. Following these procedures, six categories emerged from the officers' narratives of their learning experiences.

In addition, axial coding was used to reconnect data and highlight relations between categories and subcategories (Creswell, 1998). In axial coding, for example, we explored those aspects that seemed to contribute to "obstacles to doing counseling works in prison," such as inmate overcrowding, insufficient counseling professionalism, education requirements, a large number of antisocial personality disorder offenders, issues of professional counseling ethics, and so forth. In selective coding, all information attained through previous data analyses was integrated and used to develop clearer and more abstract explanations and descriptions of emerging themes and related information.

During the process, we identified core categories, validated existing concepts, and refined the properties and domains to define categories and concepts. Thus, it was ensured that all categories would fully take in occurrences and fully immerse into phenomena to gain an as full, comprehensive, and thorough understanding as possible. The analysis procedures were stopped when redundancies and duplication of similar ideas, meanings, experiences, and descriptions occurred among informants and when no more new information was forthcoming (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, six primary categories were constructed.

We used prolonged engagement and triangulation to enhance the credibility of the research findings (Creswell, 1998). The prolonged engagement involved the primary researcher's presence in a 30-min group interview with participants, which served as a

final form of clarification and verification. Moreover, the primary researcher obtained further direct and often repeated affirmations of what he had heard, seen, or experienced with respect to the phenomena under study after group sessions to ensure the credibility of findings. For triangulation, this study used multiple data sources, collection techniques, and methods of analysis. At first, multiple data sources including the focus group interview, follow-up survey, and observation researcher were used in this study. To increase the credibility of the truth or value, this study involved primary researcher's participation in the class. The primary researcher kept weekly observation notes that highlighted participants' reactions, behaviors, and interactions related to their experiences in the class. This study used peer debriefing, also known as collegial challenge. This refers to the process when the researcher consults in which peers or experts discuss various aspects of the study, including the emerging categories, coding process, and any methodological concerns that may arise. Finally, to analyze quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used to calculate the means and standard deviations of each item in the follow-up survey.

Results

The prominent and consistent themes that emerged were grouped into six primary categories related to (a) obstacles to doing counseling work in prisons, (b) amenability for offenders to change, (c) correctional officers' self-images, (d) advantages of SFA, (e) potential advantages of applying SFBT to offenders, and (f) the need for consolidating learning and transformation. Each category is described in more details as follows.

Obstacles to Doing Counseling Work in Prisons

Based on the participants' responses, the obstacles to doing counseling work in prisons were related to the participants' awareness of jail operations and problems. These obstacles resulted in barriers in application of counseling work in jails. In this category, the most popular coded answer was inmate overcrowding. Twenty-five of the officers interviewed stated that crowding continued to beset jails and is getting worse. Thus, issues of lack of manpower, time, and adequate counseling facilities to do counseling are the result of inmate overcrowding. The second most popular coded answer was the offenders' potential motivations and expectations in seeking help. This theme was reflected in one officer's statement, which noted, "Offenders are seeking help with a specific expectation and motivation. They may want to solve personal problems or to improve their situation. However, they are more willing to establish a close and informal relationship with officers." The third most popular coded answer was nonvoluntary types of clients. One officer indicated, "Most of the time, the offenders tend to avoid discussion of the past and are viewed as trouble makers. In general, their treatment status is non-voluntary."

Amenability for Offenders to Change

Amenability for offenders to change referred to transitional life events and alienation from personal relatives. In this category, the most popular coded answer was the

offenders' transitional life events. Twenty-three of the officers interviewed stated that almost all offenders, either awaiting trial or on probation, suffered from a transitional life event. This theme was reflected in one officer's statement, which noted that "it may be a critical time for offenders to change if someone is really concerned about them and treats them well." The second most popular coded answer was inmates' alienation from personal relations. "Being alienated from personal relations has a number of advantages for the offender population. On the one hand, the negative peer pressure may be mitigated; on the other hand, the positive influence provided from the jail education can be increased from situation to situation," said one officer. Another officer said, "Twenty-four-hour probation in jail where offenders are isolated from complicated relations with outside persons provides an access for change. In fact, it is a chance for better or for worse in terms of the inmate's change and we should take the opportunities to help make changes."

Correctional Officers' Self-Image

The correctional officers' self-images were related to how participants were able to deal with personal concerns positively and how they perceived themselves in a professional role. Twenty of the officers interviewed stated that correctional officers' self-image was an important factor that affects their performances in interacting with offenders. In this category, the most popular coded answer had to do with officers being provided with job enrichment. One officer indicated, "I think we need to take actions in a more flexible way in jails and that may bring us more trustworthy and respectful feelings. It is the best way to improve our images." The second most popular coded answer was jail internships stressing corrections as a career. One officer stated, "Having been a correctional officer for more than 10 years, I have seen a big change in public perception of who we are and what we do. Although we all feel support in doing our job, we still do not get the respect we deserve as a team in jails." The third most popular coded answer was to be involved in decision making in such matters as policy and procedure. This theme was reflected in one officer's statement, which noted that "recently, jails are improving. However, we would be pleased to see some more changes in the process of decision making for important strategies and actions from the bottom-up. It is meaningful and valuable for us to be involved in the process of decision making."

Advantages of SFA

The advantages of SFA were related to SFBT basic assumptions, which were beneficial to offenders' making changes. Twenty-six of the officers interviewed highly valued the advantages of SFA. In this category, the most popular coded answer was the scaling questions. For example, one officer indicated, "It is unbelievable how a useful technique such as the scaling question can make even the most abstract goals concrete. With scaling questions, inmates can rank responses on a scale from 1 to 10 and select a number that best represents their current situations. After that, inmates are induced to envision what they would need to do to move up on the scale. The scaling questions are

meaningful and useful for inmates because inmates can immediately sense what they are stating and where they are able to go.” The second most popular coded answer was the technique of positive and future-oriented questioning. One officer said, “The overall focus of the SFA is on taking actions rather than discussing feelings and seeking excuses. This may be particularly well suited to meet the needs of persons who have been in trouble with the law. All these skills and strategies originate from a positive and possibility-oriented thinking.” The third most popular coded answer was constructing a problem and goal. One officer indicated, “The SFA is a problem-solving and goal-reaching process. In fact, that is a vital advantage of SFA.”

Potential Advantages of Applying SFA to Offenders

The potential advantages of the SFA are mainly based on officers’ learning experiences in the SFA and their past experiences in interacting with offenders in jails. Consensus of applying SFA to offenders was reached through group discussions and brainstorming.

Twenty-seven of the officers interviewed stated that there are potential advantages of applying SFA to offenders, and they think SFA has great value and is worthy of trying in jails. In this category, the most popular coded answer was the identification of resources and effective behaviors for potential change. The second most popular coded answer was providing chances to try out new behaviors in a safe environment. For example, one officer said, “By helping inmates identify and reinforce the positive actions they have taken, the exceptions they have made to mitigate the problems of the past become meaningful and valuable to them. This provides a chance for inmates to try out new behaviors in a safe environment.” The third most popular coded answer was receiving reinforcement for change. One officer indicated, “It is great to systematically help offenders focus on solutions rather than problems by receiving reinforcement for change.”

“One of the main premises of SFA is that it is not necessary to know the cause of a complaint to resolve it. We are wondering if we didn’t have enough corrective information related to inmates’ past failures and causes how we could identify accurately the problem and set an attainable goal based on past successful experiences,” said one officer. In contrast, a few officers had different statements. One officer said, “Nearly every inmate we come into contact with may have the potential to cause great harm, or turmoil. If background information, particularly past crime records, is not accurately identified, the counseling process will be hindered, affecting the future direction of treatment.” Another officer noted, “A thorough understanding of the inmate’s worldview is required to establish a basis for solution-focused conceptualization and intervention. Based on our experiences, purposely neglecting past experiences is disadvantageous in inmate probation and intervention.”

The Need for Consolidation of Learning and Transformation

The need for the consolidation of learning and transformation was recognized as a necessary step for participants to fully understand SFA through the SFTP so that they

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Each Item for Four Categories (*N* = 29)

Technique	Categories			
	Appropriateness	Importance	Function	Difficulty
Change question	7.46 (1.23)	8.00 (1.18)	6.97 (1.28)	4.93 (2.43)
Exception question	7.43 (1.22)	7.81 (1.36)	6.86 (1.18)	4.81 (2.24)
Miracle question	7.28 (1.36)	7.88 (1.31)	6.88 (1.31)	5.17 (2.48)
Scaling question	7.39 (1.42)	7.89 (1.31)	7.00 (1.30)	4.96 (2.47)
Relationship questions	7.52 (1.27)	8.15 (1.32)	7.04 (1.51)	4.85 (2.47)
Praise	7.79 (1.37)	8.11 (1.45)	7.33 (1.54)	4.52 (2.47)

Note: Values are *M* (*SD*).

can apply concepts and skills to daily life in their interactions with offenders. Twenty-one of the officers interviewed stated that consolidating learning and transformation is an important part of the SFTP and is necessary for the improvement of interactions with offenders. In this category, the most popular coded answer was performance anxiety. This theme was reflected in one officer’s statement, which noted that “because of the lack of previous working experience in jails, there is a performance anxiety knowing I just started to learn SFA in the training program. I am aware that if I misuse SFA skills I may mislead clients’ directions for better adjustment. I think the experiences I had in the SFTP have made me more aware of what I am doing.” The second most popular answer was reflections on seeing offenders from a positive perspective. One officer said, “I found that previous experiences of being with inmates were totally incongruent with the SFA I learned from this program. What I’ve never thought of before was to see inmates with a strength-based and positive orientation, that is, having possible access to reach potential resources and changes.” The third most popular answer was trustworthiness. One officer indicated, “Trustworthiness is difficult for both inmates and officers. As I know, there is still a long way to go to create trust between offenders and us.”

Findings of the Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of each item for four categories, based on the follow-up survey.

Based on officers’ interactions with offenders during the 2-month period after the SFTP, the results indicated that participants perceived the use of SFA techniques, including changes between pretreatment and during treatment, exception questions, miracle questions, scaling questions, relationship-oriented questions, and praise, as appropriate, important, and functional. When examining the difficulty of using these techniques, it is evident that participants perceived a moderate, but not serious, level of difficulty (the means ranging from 4.52 to 5.17). In general, these techniques were highly valued by participants.

Discussion

Overall, our data suggested that the identification of the strength for offenders to change is one important factor that has yet to be described in studies on jail intervention. As outlined earlier, in this study, participants reported that the offenders' transitional life events, including 24-hour jail incarceration or being alienated from previous personal relations, were the strengths of correctional intervention, which offer opportunities for offenders to change. For most offenders, a new entry into jail is a transitional life event that results in a variety of impacts. During this period, the fulfillment of the inmates' need to be empathetically understood is an essential dynamic in both dealing with offenders' problems and facilitating their changes.

A number of participants emphasized the importance of involving officers in policy-making decisions, providing job enrichment and job identity, and increasing education requirements. However, officers' self-image is another issue, which needs to be dealt with because this has been a neglected issue in correctional research in Taiwan. How the SFA can be applied successfully in the process of interacting with inmates and helping them to reach their goals partly depends on how officers' self-image can be identified and enhanced.

Based on the participants' responses, obstacles to doing counseling work in prisons included inmates overcrowding, offenders' potential motivations and expectations in seeking help, and non-voluntary clients in each jail. Issues of lack of manpower, time, and adequate facilities to do counseling are the result of inmate overcrowding. This is an urgent problem, and it needs to be dealt with. However, it goes beyond the scope of the current study. Moreover, the offenders' potential motivations and expectations in seeking help partly may reflect the manipulative attitudes that are commonplace in prisons. Offenders may attempt to obtain the trust of an officer to extract privileges. Therefore, it is advisable that while creating a genuine relationship with the offenders, officers also confront their clients with the issue in an appropriate time during the counseling process. Based on the potential advantages of applying SFA to offenders, the identification of resources and effective behaviors for potential change are directly constructed in the initial stage. Eventually, offenders are encouraged to try out new behaviors in a safe environment and with a clear understanding that the goal of counseling cannot and will not be to establish a close and informal relationship with officers.

Participants indicated the prevalence of nonvoluntary clients in each jail. Inmates are not used to seeking counseling service. In contrast, SFA is a unique approach that includes external and internal resources for officers to use in jails based on its focus on the present, positive orientation and emphasis on strengths and solutions, rather than problems and dysfunctions (Corcoran, 1997; Lee et al., 2004). Moreover, the use of SFA for inmates seems to fully exploit each opportunity for inmates to change but to avoid the possibility of their resistances (Corcoran, 1997). Finally, SFA incorporates its treatment goals and strategic planning interventions in a brief period. Thus, it is well suited to handle the realities of many practice settings, including jails with inmates who have short attention spans and nonvoluntary treatment status (Corcoran, 1997; Juhnke & Coker, 1997).

The results of the current study also indicate the need for consolidating learning and transformation at the end of the SFTP. In fact, some of the participants, particularly junior and new officers, seemed to be unable to apply what they have learned in the SFTP and felt a sort of performance anxiety. Participants may not be used to or do not transfer what they have learned from the class. As we know, transformation does not happen automatically after the in-service training program is terminated. Hence, it requires more guidance facilitating and practice. Benander and Lightner (2005) strongly suggest that students be asked what they learned in courses and what concepts they can apply to everyday life at the end of each class. Without the process of transformation, insufficient familiarity with SFA makes it impossible for an officer to perform as desired, which may quickly result in a lack of confidence and lead to a lack of motivation. Therefore, when conducting SFBT training, it is advisable to offer officers twelve 2-min practice activities, rather than one 10-min activity. This will better allow them to consolidate what they have learned in the class. Taken together, the key to success is to use small steps, frequent repetition, and a wide variety of consolidation activities before expecting productive use (Benander & Lightner, 2005).

Finally, the results of our quantitative analyses, which are similar to Chou's (2005) findings, suggest that the use of five useful solution-focused questions was helpful and constructive. However, it also is true that participants perceived a moderate level of difficulty in the use of the SFA techniques. Hence, prolonged service training and closer supervision is undoubtedly needed, if SFA is to be applied in jails.

In sum, the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study seemed to be congruent with those found in previous studies supporting the benefits of the SFA (Corcoran, 1997; Juhnke & Coker, 1997; Lange, 2001; Lee et al., 2004; Milner & Singleton, 2008; Springer et al., 2004; Williams, 2003). Based on the findings of this study and the study by Guterman and Leite (2006), we present a modified pattern of SFA for officers working with offenders in jails in Table 2.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study was the first of its kind to explore the use of SFA for correctional officers working with offenders. Thus, several limitations need to be observed in regard to the findings. First, the retrospective nature of relying on participants' self-reports may present some sort of risks. Retrospective reports may result in some important aspects or nuances of particular changing experiences being forgotten or misremembered (Pan et al., 2007). Second, this investigation is focused on officers' perspectives, not the perspectives of offenders. The lack of offender data in evaluating the effectiveness of SFA may cause a methodological problem that suggests caution in drawing conclusions based on the results. Although the officers' perceptions and experiences from an SFTP and their initial use of solution-focused questions in jails were presented in this study, it is hard to know if their improvement persists in their interactions with offenders. The effectiveness of SFA needs to be further studied through quantitative research. Third, because of the small sample size and its relative homogeneity, replication is recommended

Table 2. A Modified Pattern of SFA and Its Particular Techniques

Stage	Particular technique	Practical usage
First	Constructing a problem and a goal	How can I be useful to you? Whose idea is it that you come here today?
Second	Identifying and amplifying exceptions	Has there been a time when you coped better with the problem? How did you make that happen?
Third	Assigning tasks designed to identify and amplify exceptions	Between now and the next time we meet, I would like you to continue to think of more exceptions. Between now and the next time we meet, I would like you to think about what you will be doing differently when the problem is improved.
Fourth	Evaluating the effectiveness of tasks and reevaluating the problem and goal	If the goal has been reached or significant progress has been made in the direction of the goal, why do you think that further intervention is still needed?

with larger and more diverse samples. Large samples can provide more precise estimates of population parameters. Moreover, the homogeneity of members may affect the participants' perceptions of their learning experiences. This constraint also might create a methodological problem that suggests caution in interpreting the results. Fourth, an assessment of the use of SFA needs a comparison study with other approaches. The results of the comparison between two or three approaches could fully reflect similarities and differences. Although it is reasonable to expect that SFA has more impact on offenders because of its unique features (Corcoran, 1997; Juhnke & Coker, 1997), such findings are yet to be confirmed. Finally, this study was conducted in Taiwan and may therefore be affected by cultural factors. Replications in other locations are required to establish the reliability of the results.

Implications for Correctional Interventions

The results of this study suggest important implications for correctional interventions. Specifically, participants evaluated positively the use of the SFA for its strengths in interacting with offenders. Although the empirical research regarding the use of SFA with offenders is rare, we suggest that in-service training programs for correctional officers incorporate the implications of SFA in working with inmates. The enhancement of the officers' self-image could be a vital factor influencing their performance and interaction with inmates. Strengthening communication between superintendents and officers, listening to officers' ideas and suggestions in the process of policy decision making, and providing job enrichment and job identity are all helpful strategies to promote officers' positive and healthy self-images. Because participants reported their

feelings about the difficulty of SFA and their worries about using SFA in jails, the authors believe that SFA supervision is vital for officers working with inmates (Presbury, Echterling, & McKee, 1999; Trenhaile, 2005). Fourth, the consolidation of learning and transformation at the end of SFTPs should be enhanced. Therefore, division of solution-focused techniques into several steps to be practiced with frequent repetition and the use of a wide variety of consolidation activities in each SFTP are suggested. Finally, although SFA is not a relationship-oriented approach, it is strongly suggested that officers express their willingness to provide helping services after the counseling session is closed and encourage inmates to try a new way for themselves. This is because, once tried in the prison, an amicable relationship between an officer and an inmate could be replicated by the inmate with himself or herself in jails as well as with significant others after his or her release.

Although this is a preliminary study with limitations, the results encourage the initiation of further investigations in this field because correctional interventions lag behind when it comes to clinical knowledge and practice.

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